

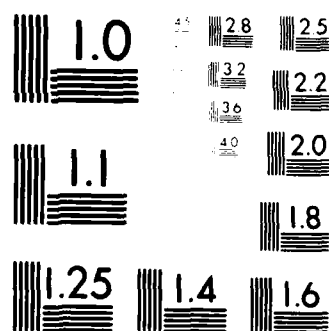
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Bruce Hoffman

February 1986

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The Rand Corporation, 1700 Main Street, P.O. Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90406-2138

TERRORISM IN THE UNITED STATES DURING 1985*

Bruce Hoffman

INTRODUCTION

Events throughout 1985 demonstrated repeatedly the threat posed to United States interests and citizens by terrorists abroad. During a year in which there were record highs both in the number of terrorist incidents worldwide and their resultant fatalities, the hijacking of a TWA airliner in June, the murder that same month of four American servicemen in El Salvador, the pirating of an Italian cruise ship in October, seizure of an Egypt Air plane in November and the massacre of American travelers in Rome and Vienna the following month underscored a long-standing pattern of international terrorism. The United States is-- and has long been--the number one target of a variety of foreign terrorist organizations. Indeed, of the approximately 450 acts of terrorism during 1985 recorded in the Rand Corporation's terrorism chronology,¹ a quarter (111) were directed against American targets.

At the same time, however, the United States itself--as has also long been the case--has remained relatively insulated from these escalations of terrorist violence. Moreover, a preliminary examination of 1985 statistics from Rand's chronology reveals that there was a decline in the number of terrorist incidents in this country from 51 incidents in 1984 to 24 during the past year.

However heartening this development may be, or however small this total appears in comparison with the worldwide figure, we should not be lulled into thinking that the United States is either immune to violence from political extremists within its own borders or that the terrorist acts which occur here do not warrant attention.

*Testimony presented before the American Jewish Committee National Affairs Commission National Task Force on Anti-Semitism and Extremism on 3 February 1986 in Los Angeles, California.

¹As of 7 January 1986, 438 terrorist incidents had been recorded in the Rand chronology. Past experience, however, suggests that by the time the final figures are available that number will have increased by 10 percent.

But before I discuss what I see as some sources of concern, let me briefly consider some of the likely reasons behind last year's decline in terrorist incidents.

REASONS FOR THE DECLINE

One reason, undoubtedly, is the continuing success achieved by the FBI as well as state and local law enforcement agencies in tracking down and arresting wanted and suspected terrorists. For example, last September, 13 key members of two Puerto Rican separatist groups, the FALN (the Spanish acronym of "Armed Forces for National Liberation") and the *Macheteros*, were arrested in Boston, Dallas, Puerto Rico and Mexico. This was but the latest in a series of blows dealt to the separatists by government agencies that began with the capture of 11 FALN members in 1980, the group's premiere bomb-maker, William Morales, in 1983, and four other group members that same year. Thus, whereas Puerto Rican separatists had been the most active terrorists in this country--having committed some 161 acts of violence between 1977 and 1984--they were responsible for just one incident in 1985.

Widespread arrests of members of other ethnic terrorist organizations, such as those in this country's large Armenian and Cuban exile communities, have similarly undermined these two movements. Between 1980 and 1982, for instance, 15 attacks were staged by Armenian terrorists, with no further terrorist operations since. The abrupt suspension of Armenian violence is undoubtedly due in part to the harsh prison sentence handed down to Hampig Sassounian, who was convicted of murdering the Turkish Consul-General in Los Angeles, and the arrests in October 1982 of five other Armenian youths who were en route from Los Angeles to Philadelphia on a bombing mission. At one time, anti-Castro Cuban militants were among the most active terrorists in the United States. During 1980 and 1983, they are credited with 32 acts of terrorism. However, the apprehension of six key members of the Omega-7 group during 1982 and of their leader, Eduardo Arocena, in 1983, so severely crippled the anti-Castro terrorist movement that no further incidents have occurred.

In the case of all three of these ethnic/emigre terrorist movements another reason for their respective declines may be simple disillusionment and exhaustion among old members and the waning enthusiasm of potential recruits. One of the distinguishing characteristics of ethnic/emigre terrorism in the United States has been their ability--unlike issue-oriented, left-wing terrorists, for example--to spawn successor generations. Young members of these ethnic communities, inculcated with the folklore of past acts of heroism and daring by their elders, once formed an eager pool of recruits to the terrorist organizations. It appears, however, that as the goals of the terrorists have become increasingly distant despite years of effort--either to bring about the creation of an independent and sovereign Puerto Rico, obtain recognition from Turkey for Armenian claims of events that took place over 70 years ago, or overthrow Castro and liberate Cuba from communism--and their violence has brought no tangible results, the ardor of both old members and potential recruits has waned.

Continuing friction in relations between the United States and Libya has recently been cited as increasing the likelihood of Libyan "hit-squads" being deployed to this country. On at least two occasions in the past, state-sponsored terrorist acts--allegedly carried out at the behest of Libyan leader Mu'ammarr Qaddafi--have in fact occurred. It should be emphasized that Libyan actions in the United States have been restricted to attacks on Libyan nationals and not directed against American targets here. Nevertheless, in October 1980, a Libyan graduate student in Colorado was seriously wounded and the following July another Libyan student was found murdered in Utah. Further assassinations, however, were probably prevented by the arrest of two Libyan students in August 1984 when they attempted to purchase silencer-equipped small arms from undercover FBI agents.

Indeed, continuous monitoring of Libyan student activity here resulted in the creation of a special federal grand jury in June 1985 to investigate evidence of other assassination plots directed against at least three Libyan opponents of the Qaddafi regime. Some 15 Libyans resident in this country were subpoenaed to appear before the jury. Whether by coincidence or not, shortly after the grand jury began to

hear testimony, a Libyan diplomat attached to his country's UN delegation was deported on grounds of his involvement in planning the assassination of Libyan dissidents here.

Inroads have been made against left-wing terrorists as well. On 11 May 1985, federal authorities arrested Marilyn Jean Buck, one of the handful of suspects still at large from the botched hold up of a Brinks armored truck in Nyack, New York in 1981. Evidence discovered in the safehouse used by Buck linked her and two accomplices to sixteen bombings that had occurred in the New York and Washington, D.C. areas since 1982--including the U.S. Capitol building in November 1983. In March 1985, seven members of the United Freedom Front (UFF), another leftist group, were indicted on charges of bombing a total of ten businesses and military installations in the New York metropolitan area. The arrest of the seven seriously undermined their organization as evinced by the fact that the last action claimed by the UFF was in September 1984--just two months before the first wave of arrests which resulted in the March indictments.

Unlike ethnic/emigre terrorists, domestic leftist-wing radicals have always had trouble recruiting new members to their organizations. To a great extent, the majority of the left-wing organizations are simply recycled versions of radical groups that first surfaced in the late 1960s and early 1970s to oppose United States involvement in Southeast Asia. The apprehension of the seven UFF terrorists is a case in point, as it was discovered that the group was in fact an almost identical--but rechristened--version of the decade-old Melville-Jackson Group. In this respect, then, arrests of members have a particularly devastating effect on the leftist groups since they are unable to replenish their ranks easily. Hence, it is not surprising that there has been a dramatic decline in left-wing terrorist activity in this country. The lone attack in 1985 credited to a left-wing group (the Red Guerrilla Defense) was the February bombing of the Police Benevolent Association offices in New York City.

INCREASES IN DOMESTIC TERRORIST ACTIVITY AND OTHER SOURCES OF CONCERN

Jewish Terrorism

The only increase in domestic terrorist activity came from Jewish extremists--who, according to the FBI, are associated with the Jewish Defense League (JDL). Despite the fact that the JDL is a perfectly legal entity--incorporated under New York State law and enjoying tax-exempt status because of its religious affiliation--the group has not only long been classified as a terrorist organization by the FBI, but has been cited as this country's second most active one.² Indeed, between 1977 and 1984, 37 acts of terrorism were attributed to the JDL by FBI officials. Moreover, during the past decade or so, at least 50 indictments have been handed down to JDL members of whom at least 30 have been convicted in United States courts of committing, or conspiring to commit, terrorist offenses.

During the past ten years, as the JDL experienced a decline in membership and influence, the threat that it posed appeared to be primarily symbolic. The group used terrorism to draw attention to itself and its causes, to maintain momentum, and perpetuate its image as an "action-oriented," non-traditional, Jewish pressure group. Recent events, however, suggest that this view requires revision. The recent increase of militant Jewish terrorism represents not only an escalation of violence but a significant change in targeting patterns, as well as a dramatic shift in tactics.

Twelve times as many terrorist acts have either been claimed by or are alleged to have been carried out by Jewish extremists in 1985 as in either 1983 or 1984 (one incident occurred in each of the two earlier years). Whereas Soviet property and diplomatic personnel were previously the terrorists' primary targets, only two attacks this year were connected with the Soviet Union. Rather, it now appears that the terrorists primary focus has shifted to organizations and individuals perceived by them as hostile to Jewish interests.

²Orange County Register, 18 November 1985.

This is not an entirely new development. As far back as 1976 the JDL had already begun to expand its scope of activities to include Iraqi, Iranian, Egyptian, Palestinian, Lebanese, French and German targets. But these operations were isolated and infrequent and were consistently overshadowed by the group's preoccupation with the issue of Soviet Jewry. There appears now to be a concentration of effort against persons and institutions considered to be enemies of Jews and Israel. Targets now include alleged former Nazis and war-criminals, Palestinian and Arab individuals and institutions, and persons and so-called research centers promoting views about the Holocaust that minimize the dimensions of Jewish suffering.

Perhaps the most far-reaching change, however, is the increasing use of assassination, both to draw attention to the terrorists' causes and to eliminate perceived enemies of the Jewish people and Israel. This is an ominous development. Political violence does not occur in a vacuum and is responsive to both internal and external stimuli. In the case of the JDL, the internal stimulus undoubtedly comes from the decline in membership and financial contributions that the group has experienced in recent years. By expanding its targets, Jewish extremists--as other terrorists have attempted--may also be trying to appeal to a larger and more diverse constituency. This could represent a bid to regain the momentum and duplicate the JDL's successes of the 1970s.

External stimuli probably include the growing sense of unease felt by Jews in the United States as a result of the anti-Semitic insinuations and proclamations issued by the Reverend Louis Farrakhan, leader of the Black Muslim Nation of Islam; the growing evidence of a widespread network of right-wing and neo-Nazi extremists in the United States; the hijacking of a TWA aircraft in June 1985 by radical Shi'as in which Jewish passengers were separated from Gentiles; and the murder of Leon Klinghoffer (an American Jew who was a passenger on the Italian cruise ship seized by Palestinian terrorists in October 1985). All of these developments have alarmed Jews, and more important, they may have convinced the terrorists that the Jewish public has become more amenable to and supportive of militant Jewish activity.

Right-Wing Extremism

Another significant area of concern is the growth of right-wing extremist activity in the United States. Although organized hate-groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and various incarnations of Hitler's National Socialist (Nazi) party have existed in this country for decades, the advent of extremist white supremacist/paramilitary groups oriented towards "survivalism," outdoor skills, guerrilla training, and outright sedition--such as the Aryan Nations, the Order, the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord (CSA), and the Posse Comitatus--is a newer phenomenon. Although the geographical locus of the movement is in the West, Mid-West and South of the U.S., the extremists' network extends as far east as North Carolina and Georgia, west to California and the Pacific northwest states and on a north-south axis embracing Texas and Canada.

The members of these groups are, for the most part, not full-time terrorists as is often the case with their leftist counterparts.³ Rather, they see themselves as "minutemen": the inheritors of the tradition of the American Revolution's "minutemen" who were available at a moment's notice "to fight for their inalienable rights." They are bound together by their shared hostility to any form of government above the county level; their vilification of Jews and non-whites as children of Satan; their obsession with achieving the religious and racial purification of the U.S.; their belief in a conspiracy theory of powerful Jewish interests controlling the government, banks and media; and their advocacy of the overthrow of the U.S. government, or "Zionist Occupation Government," as they call it.

During 1985, 23 members of the Order were apprehended in 12 states, 11 of whom were convicted of a variety of offenses under federal racketeering statutes in December. But the incarceration of what appears to have been the nucleus of the Order and the death 13 months earlier of the group's founder and leader, Robert Matthews, does not, however, mean that the group has been completely neutralized. There are indications that throughout 1984 and 1985 members of the Order were busy

³The group known as the Order appears to be the main exception.

establishing a network of safehouses and support cells in the southwestern and southeastern regions of the U.S. Indeed, the organization of the group was such that the identities of many members still at large are not known. Security measures used by the Order included requirements that members carry false identification (often names taken from headstones at local cemeteries) at all times, and the use of disguises and code-names.

Another potential threat from the right comes from the organization calling itself the Posse Comitatus. The basic *raison d'être* of the Posse Comitatus is anti-federalism. Its members are opposed to the federal and state income tax, the existence of the Federal Reserve System and the supremacy of the federal judiciary over local courts. Federal and state taxes in particular are decried as "Communist and unconstitutional"; and a return to the gold standard and abolition of the Federal Reserve Bank are advocated.

Throughout the 1970s, local chapters of the organization were founded in almost every state in the country. According to one observer, "The group maintained a low profile, concentrating on passive tax protest activities, such as providing legal counsel for tax evaders and prompting constitutional justification for local county rules and powers." However, during 1984 and 1985, Posse Comitatus "has become more violent, particularly in the midwest and far northwest."⁴ To some extent this trend has been fueled by the plight of financially-depressed farmers in those regions. Searching for an answer to their economic predicament, these persons become susceptible to facile political and religious interpretations of their problems and responsive to grandiose conspiracy theories of secret cabals composed of Jews, bankers, and the U.S. Federal Government to explain their situation. As Dixon Terry, chairman of the Iowa Farm Unit Coalition, explained, "Farmers are victims of the hate propaganda and phony schemes of a surprisingly strong, organized right-wing element."⁵

⁴David Audsley, "POSSE COMITATUS," *TVI Journal*, Summer 1985, p. 13.

⁵*New York Times*, 21 September 1985.

Reports of increasing extremist and white supremacist recruitment activity and propaganda efforts aimed at Midwestern farmers have surfaced throughout the past year. Ku Klux Klan publications such as *The White Patriot*, the fledgling Populist Party's organ, *The Spotlight*, and the extremist National Agricultural Press Association's (now discontinued) *Primrose and Cattleman's Gazette* have appealed to farmers to stop paying taxes, ignore state and federal judicial authority, abjure from using U.S. currency, and arm themselves. The present farm crisis is blamed on "bankers and Zionists operating through the Federal Reserve System." As the KKK publication declared, "To put it simply, the Jew plan is to steal your land."⁶

There is also evidence of growing right-wing extremist involvement in the anti-abortion issue. The Posse Comitatus, in particular, has stated in its publications that abortion is part of the global conspiracy "masterminded" by the Jews.⁷ Nor is this type of twisted thinking isolated in the poorer, rural, and less cosmopolitan regions of the U.S. The recorded telephone message of an Orange County, California group, the White American Resistance, informed callers that:

Almost all abortion doctors are Jews. Abortion makes money for Jews. Almost all abortion nurses are lesbians. Abortion gives a thrill to lesbians. Abortion in Orange County is promoted by the corrupt Jewish organization called Planned Parenthood...Jews would do anything for money, including the rape of innocent children followed by the ripping and tearing of the living child from the young mother's womb, while it is still forming. Jews must be punished for this holocaust and murder of white children, along with their perverted lesbian nurses who enjoy their jobs too much.⁸

Moreover, despite a decline in the number of abortion clinic bombings in 1985 (five as compared to 21 during 1984), there appears to have been a significant change in the anti-abortionist terrorists'

⁶New York Times, 20 September 1985.

⁷James Ridgeway, "Unholy Terrorists," *Village Voice*, 25 January 1985.

⁸Quoted in *Ibid.*

tactics. In December 1985, for example a small bomb exploded in a New York City abortion clinic "full of patients and staff." A last-minute call to police warning of the bomb enabled the building to be evacuated shortly before the explosion took place. As Faye Wattleton, president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, explained, "Until recently, all attacks have occurred under the cover of darkness during times when there was some hope that no one would be hurt by bombs or arson. [This] bomb exploded in mid-afternoon, with clinic patients and staff on the premises."⁹

Far more disquieting, however, was the large parcel bomb mailed to a Portland, Oregon clinic that was designed to explode upon opening. A clinic staff member, instructed to look for suspicious packages, alerted police who safely defused the device. Postal authorities in Portland subsequently discovered three other mail bombs addressed to two abortion clinics and a Planned Parenthood clinic that does not, in fact, perform abortions. This incident, the first demonstrating a deliberate intent to kill someone--along with the New York incident--suggests an alarming change in militant anti-abortion tactics.

CONCLUSION: FUTURE PROSPECTS IN DOMESTIC TERRORISM

Despite an overall decline in terrorism in the United States during 1985, there remain sources of concern that merit continued attention and vigilance. Among them is the upsurge in violence by Jewish militants, the existence of a widespread network of volatile, right-wing extremist organizations, and the ominous apparent shift in the nature of anti-abortion terrorist operations.

The increase in Jewish terrorism does not necessarily imply a continued escalation of such activity in the United States. Past events have demonstrated how periodical outbursts of concentrated violence are often followed by dramatic declines in terrorist operations because of heightened attention from federal and local law enforcement agencies. Nevertheless, terrorist incidents that occur abroad and specifically target or indirectly involve Jews from the United States or elsewhere, may provoke deliberately retaliatory or revenge-minded strikes and

⁹Associated Press Wire Service, 18 December 1985.

create a dangerous cycle of international terrorism and domestic, vigilante, responses.

Although there is an almost natural inclination to dismiss right-wing extremists and white-supremacists as intemperate hot-heads, uneducated "country bumpkins," or mentally unstable alarmists, they have demonstrated that they are serious in their beliefs and dedicated to their causes and, moreover, are willing to use violence in pursuit of their goals. The neo-Nazis, anti-Semites, racists and "survivalists" who comprise this geographically widespread network of groups are not the isolated, technically unsophisticated, crude pipe-bomb manufacturers who have dominated most of the U.S.-based terrorist groups in the past. They are well-trained in the use of arms and explosives, are skilled armorers and bomb-makers, and are adept at guerrilla warfare techniques and outdoor survival. They are violent and, more confounding to the analyst, they are mercurial and unpredictable.

Further, the right-wing terrorists embody many of the traits typical of both ethnic/emigre and left-wing terrorists. The rightists, like the ethnic/emigre groups, are more violent than their leftist counterparts, have been able to replenish their ranks with new recruits and, like the left-wing terrorists, are motivated in some cases by controversial, popular political issues (such as abortion) to enlarge their power base.

One of the difficulties faced by the analyst attempting to forecast terrorist trends in the United States is the small number of incidents that annually occur here. This paucity of data--combined with the volatile and dynamic character of terrorism itself--attaches a preeminent qualification to analyses of future prospects. Suffice it to say, that while the number of terrorist incidents in this country is relatively small compared with those overseas and, moreover, is statistically insignificant compared to the amount of violent domestic (non-political) crimes, they nevertheless merit continued attention and should not be dismissed completely.

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